

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
July 9, 2017
Jeremiah 20:7-13
The Conflicting Forces at Work within Us
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Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Have you ever been conflicted about proclaiming “the Word of the LORD?” I mean, preaching the law of God and the need for daily repentance of sin often brings “insult and reproach all day long.” Some years ago after a Great Exchange presentation to the parents of our preschool children, a mother rebuked me for daring to say her child was sinful and said she was withdrawing the child from our program.

You may have experienced a similar reaction more than once. Dare we stop preaching the law and repentance? We can’t. We can’t because “his word is in my heart like a burning fire. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” That child I mentioned stayed with us after all. We were able to share with her and the other children the messages of sin and the love God has for them in their Savior, Jesus Christ. We are blessed and privileged to be able still to share these truths with little children as God graciously has granted us the continuation of our preschool program.

So, we can relate to Jeremiah’s dilemma, can’t we? We get discouraged and want to give up but we can’t and need strength to continue. Look with me at **The Conflicting Forces at Work within Us**. We want to quit the work but zeal for the Lord burns within us. To whom can we turn for help?

Jeremiah was for the most part a preacher of repentance. The people had sunk deep into many vices and idolatry. The kings had been wicked instead of godly. The hand of the Lord’s judgment was going to fall heavy on Jerusalem and Judah if there was not repentance. Jeremiah did not hold back in this message. One result was a priest named Pashhur he had the prophet beaten and put into stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the Lord’s Temple.

This was for Jeremiah, to say the least, disheartening. The LORD had “deceived him,” or persuaded him to do this work. Jeremiah had thought it would always go well and his message well received. It was not, just the opposite. So, Jeremiah complained “I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction.”

There was no doubt in Jeremiah’s mind as to the source of his troubles. “So the Word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long.” His misery was on account of his faithfulness to God’s Word and his deep concern for the souls of God’s people.

And yet, the prophet could not give up his work. The word was burning in his heart. He could not hold it back. Even though Jeremiah knew the plans the people had to lay in wait for him and destroy him, he had to continue.

This is the conflict at work within us. We have the Word of God. We preach the law and sin that is breaking that law. We preach repentance, sorrow over that sin, and confession of those sins to God. We preach forgiveness of those sins in the blood of Christ alone through faith.

People do not always listen to or believe these messages. They are not happy with us when we come to them and hold the mirror of the law before their hearts. They do not like to hear that

Jesus is their Savior not them. It is not just them, it also is us. Our sinful nature rebels against the Word and those who apply it to our lives. We can begin to want to stop sharing the Word, or want others to stop sharing it with us.

Where do we get the strength to continue in our desire to share the Word and listen to the Word? To whom can we turn for help?

Jeremiah shows us. He turned to the LORD for the strength to be able to win the conflict and do what his heart desired be a faithful messenger of repentance and faith. Jeremiah did also hold out the promise of God's grace in the coming Savior who would give them hope and a future as his plans for them.

“But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgiven.”

Although the prophet was experiencing the truth of what Jesus said in our gospel lesson, he knew he was not alone. So do we know that as Christ's enemies mistreat us as they mistreated him, our Savior is with us like a mighty warrior. Through his eternal power and through the agency of his mighty angels, God protects us and delivers us. The disgrace and dishonor our enemies may expect might not come until the final judgment but it is coming for sure.

We are never alone when we share sin and grace. There are times we might have to change our approach. For example, over the past years we have concentrated on sharing the gospel with our preschool children and have their parents hear it through them rather than dealing directly with the parents in a formal presentation. That may or may not change in the future. It is helpful at times, also, to develop a relationship with someone before having the chance to share the Word with them.

However we go about it, we dare not let the fear and shame others try and put on us make us give up the work. We can't because the love of God in Christ for the world is burning in our hearts. We do not share Christ's sacrifice for sin on the cross and his resurrection so much based on the law of the Great Commission, but more so on the basis of the gospel of justification in Christ for the entire world.

The people in Jeremiah's day only wanted a message of peace and security. Jeremiah would not lie. So, they persecuted the prophet and rejected the will and message of God. Suddenly destruction came upon them. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried the nation into exile in a foreign land.

It is the same today. God will give us the strength to do the work. Luther wrote about his day and we apply it to our days. “But Christ will be able to sustain his own, for whose sake he causes his word to shine forth in this shameful time of ours, just as at Babylon he sustained Daniel and those like him, for whose sake Jeremiah's prophecy had to shine forth.”

And, we echo his doxology as he continued, “To the same dear Lord be praise and thanks, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God overall and to eternity. Amen.” <SDG>